United Nations A/55/PV.14

General Assembly

Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting
Thursday, 14 September 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

President Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 122 *(continued)*

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/55/345/Add.4)

The President: I should like to inform members that, since the issuance of documents A/55/345 and Addenda 1 to 3, Grenada and Guinea have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The President: This information will be reflected in document A/55/345/Add.4, to be issued.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Selim El-Hoss, President of the Council of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lebanese Republic.

Mr. El-Hoss (Lebanon) *(spoke in Arabic)*: It gives me pleasure, Sir, to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. I am confident that your vast experience and unswerving efforts will guarantee the achievement of the best results at this session.

I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia, for having wisely and successfully conducted the deliberations of the fifty-fourth session. I would be remiss if I failed to express to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, our thanks and appreciation for his efforts to preserve the principles and purposes of the Charter with a view to consolidating the prospects for peace and stability around the world.

A new century has been ushered in. Our peoples and countries believe in the United Nations and in its ability to embrace new visions and concepts. We have high hopes that a reinvigorated Organization will promote a new world order forged, in essence, by the new forces at play. This will be a world order free from the new power play in order to consolidate the prospects for international peace and security in different parts of the globe and to meet the costs of development, which is the right of each and every individual. This can only be accomplished if we succeed in reactivating the central role of the United Nations. The primary organs of the Organization, namely, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, must be entrusted with containing and checking the dangers that face humanity and that threaten its social and economic peace as well as its security.

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I am pleased to announce that, towards the end of next year, Lebanon will host the summit of the International Organization of La Francophonie to be held in the context of the Dialogue among Civilizations. Lebanon's experience in coexistence, its pluralistic nature and its openness to the world are, in our view, the best expression of such a dialogue.

We all agree that the United Nations is an indispensable international institution, notwithstanding its inability to settle many disputes since its inception. The United Nations has at times been lax in enforcing its own resolutions, and at others it has been influenced by the international balance of power, which made it blind to the double standards at play. But what is indisputable is that the United Nations, with its mandates and its multifaceted world activities, constitutes a major human achievement and tradition. We must build upon this achievement by evincing the necessary will to lead the world towards reconciliation whilst maintaining the necessary balance between the collective interests of States, large and small.

Our actions must be based on the principles of solidarity, equality and justice enshrined in the Charter. This is of particular importance at this crucial juncture in our human existence. While vast regions of the world are plagued by poverty, deprivation and disease, others are enjoying a social and economic boom rarely matched in the history of mankind. It is therefore important to jump start the different United Nations organs and specialized agencies, which have already impressed us with daily records of achievement that stand as a true measure of our collective spirit of solidarity . This solidarity must be the cornerstone of a new humanitarian world order capable of protecting the individual and of respecting all aspects of his rights.

In this context, we highly value the steps taken to restructure some of the development organs of the Organization. Such steps have introduced into their work programmes the concept of cooperation with the institutions of civil society and with international financial institutions, the private sector and the donor community.

In the second half of May this year, Lebanon and the United Nations witnessed a historic event when my country recovered most of its occupied territories in the south and in western Bekaa. Thanks to the resistance and steadfastness of the Lebanese people and the support of the international community, Israel had to withdraw from these territories after a ferocious occupation that lasted more than 22 years. It left behind a trail of devastation and destruction of infrastructure, private property and the environment, as well as a collapse in local production centres. Lebanon has paid dearly for its liberation. Thousands fell as martyrs on the road to victory and thousands more were injured or disabled.

Human and material losses were not confined to the areas that were immediately under occupation. For 30 years, the Israeli arm of aggression has stretched far to reach all Lebanese territories. Repeated Israeli strikes terrorized our civilian population, destroyed civilian and vital establishments and wreaked havoc on our economic and service sectors. The Israeli withdrawal came in the wake of 22 years of continued refusal to comply with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), which called upon Israel to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa to the internationally recognized borders, with strict respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

For the first time since 1978, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was allowed to fulfil its mandate under resolution 425 (1978). To do this, the United Nations had to identify a line for the purpose of confirming the Israeli withdrawal. Regrettably, in three locations, this line did not conform to the internationally recognized boundary line demarcated in 1923 between Palestine and Lebanon under the French and British Mandates. The United Nations border line also leaves the Shabaa farmlands outside UNIFIL's area of operation in Southern Lebanon.

Lebanon has seriously cooperated with the United Nations to fulfil the requirements for the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Despite Israel's repeated violations of the withdrawal line and its obstructive practices, which hindered the deployment of the international work force for weeks, the force was at long last able to deploy, accompanied by the Lebanese armed forces.

At this juncture, I see it fit to recall Lebanon's civilized stance and the wisdom and tolerance graciously shown by its valiant people after its victory and the withdrawal of the Israeli forces. Contrary to dire predictions, no mayhem or acts of vengeance

ensued. This has earned us the appreciation and admiration of the international community.

On this occasion, allow me to pay tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, to his assistants and to the officers and soldiers of UNIFIL for the tireless and unswerving efforts they have been making in fulfilment of their noble task and in compliance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

In this context, I would like to underline the importance of the following points. First, Lebanon insists that its internationally recognized borders remain intact. They are the borders demarcated in accordance with the 1923 Paulet-Newcomb maps, and reaffirmed later in the 1949 Israeli-Lebanese General Armistice Agreement. Second, Lebanon confirms its reservations on three locations on the blue line of withdrawal adopted by the United Nations as the withdrawal line. This reservation is included in the report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on 16 June 2000.

Third, Lebanon insists on its right to sovereignty over the Shaba'a farmlands, which are an integral part of Lebanese territories. Fourth, Lebanon insists on its sovereignty and authority over the locations set by the United Nations inside the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) line in the Mount Hermon area.

Fifth, Lebanon demands the immediate release of all Lebanese detainees from Israeli prisons. They are kept as hostages in violation of the terms of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, of the relevant Protocols and of the Hague Convention of 1907. Lebanon believes that the release of the detainees will be a completion of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and will therefore be a fulfilment of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Sixth, the liberation of Lebanese territories from Israeli occupation shall remain compromised unless a just solution is found to the problem of Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon. The solution lies in allowing these refugees to return to their homeland, as provided for in the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Israel must compensate Lebanon for the human, material and economic losses sustained as a result of Israeli occupation and other acts of aggression, in accordance with international and customary laws and with the principles of the United Nations Charter. In this regard, we recall Security Council resolution 262 (1968), which entitled Lebanon to appropriate redress for the enormous destruction it suffered when Israel attacked Beirut's International Airport in late 1968. In that attack, Israel destroyed 13 civilian Lebanese aircraft. The Lebanese firmly believe in their right to receive adequate and fair reparations for the substantial loss and devastation inflicted upon them after many long years of occupation and repeated acts of aggression. Those acts have been perpetrated by Israel since 1978 in stark defiance of the will of the United Nations.

Lebanon will therefore resort to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is the proper organ to which to address its claims. We hope that the ICJ will be able to endorse our request for adequate reparations and we appeal to the international community to support our just and fair demands.

The question of the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Lebanese liberated territories enjoys a high priority on the Lebanese agenda. It also enjoys tangible international support. In this context, I would like to recall the preparatory meeting of the donor community, held in Beirut on 27 July in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the support of the World Bank and the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. This meeting was attended by representatives of 40 States and international financial institutions. The participants discussed the question of providing urgent financial assistance to help restore normalcy to the liberated territories. The preliminary deliberations were promising and we hope to see them materialize at the donors' conference to be held at the ministerial level in October.

The Lebanese feel that the international community did not exert adequate efforts to compel Israel to comply with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which called upon Israel to end its occupation a long time ago. Due to this delay, Lebanon as a whole had to suffer the dire consequences of occupation. Our resources plummeted, our economy crumbled and our people endured untold suffering. From this rostrum, I appeal to the donor countries, to international financial institutions and to the United Nations specialized agencies to provide sufficient assistance for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of South Lebanon.

This will be a token of solidarity on behalf of the international community.

We thought that the prospects for the realization of a just and comprehensive peace in the region were real following the recent rounds of negotiations. Regrettably, the results were disappointing. The negotiations for peace floundered and the process was derailed on all tracks. This was due to the fact that the Israeli leaders gave the logic of "No's" precedence over the principles of right and justice. This is particularly unfortunate in the light of the many achievements made in bringing the negotiations so close to an optimal solution, especially on the Syrian track.

The prerogatives of peace are not commensurate with the Israeli "No's". These "No's" run counter to the resolutions of international legitimacy that provided for the return to Syria of the entire Golan up to the line of 4 June 1967. These resolutions also recognized the need to enable the Palestinian people to recover their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination, the establishment of their independent State on their own national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, and their right to return to their homeland in Palestine.

The liberation of most of the Lebanese territories from Israeli occupation will not affect Lebanon's commitment to the process of peaceful settlement of the Middle East question. Lebanon upholds its position with regard to the inseparability of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. We believe that the opportunity for a just and comprehensive peace remains, provided that Israel complies with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Madrid terms of reference.

Lebanon believes that Israel has forfeited the achievements made in its negotiations with the Arab side due to the conflicting domestic agendas of various Israeli political groups. This will hinder the settlement process in the region, and will further compromise our protracted pursuit of peace. Lebanon calls on the co-sponsors of the peace process — the United States and the Russian Federation — and the European Union to renew their efforts to relaunch the peace process from the point where it left off in 1996.

Lebanon cannot fail to stress once again that in order to achieve a peaceful settlement, the Palestinian refugees, particularly those hosted by Lebanon, must be allowed to return to their homeland. Ignoring their problem or attempting to resettle them in Lebanon will further exacerbate the tension and the volatility of the region. This would in turn threaten the prospects of a just and lasting peace.

More than 10 years have passed since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Nevertheless, the question of the release of the Kuwaiti detainees and prisoners of war still awaits a solution. We in Lebanon have condemned this invasion. We believe that, in addition to other measures required of Iraq, the release of prisoners will be an important step towards improving relations with that country. Lebanon calls for lifting the sanctions imposed on Iraq in order to alleviate the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people and to allow them to restore their security, stability and prosperity.

There is a favourable trend in the relationship between Iran and the Gulf States. That trend must be an incentive to settle the dispute over three islands that has been going on between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Arab Emirates for over three decades. It should be settled in the context of good-neighbourliness and the common interests promoted by the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The Millennium Summit was convened as part of a global effort to foster the credibility of the United Nations and its ability to seek solutions to the problems of all countries and peoples. The international Organization must be capable of keeping up with the demands and challenges of the new millennium, whenever and wherever they arise. The deliberations of the Millennium Summit made it clear that what was at stake was the individual. Attempts to arrive at a global vision may differ in the details, but should definitely agree on the substance. In our view, the Millennium Declaration embodied creative ideas and principles that must be embraced in a global blueprint and translated into reality. Such a blueprint introduces novel approaches to the purposes and working methods of the United Nations.

Lebanon agrees with the conclusions of the Summit. The main challenge we face today is to guarantee that the benefits of globalization are shared by all peoples of the world. The correct approach is for us to stand united so that globalization and its manifestations and results will have a human face. Adequate controls must be developed and must take into account the different cultures, traditions and real

needs of the peoples of the world. The costs and benefits of globalization must be fairly and equally distributed.

Lebanon also believes that the protection of our common environment presents a different kind of challenge. Careful strategies must be developed for water-resource management, combating desertification, respecting and preserving ecosystems and combating environmental pollution. Those strategies must be governed by new ethics. God has privileged Lebanon with a scenic landscape and an optimal geographic location. Regrettably, we have had our share of environmental degradation. We therefore attach increasing importance to environmental issues. Laws are currently being enacted for the preservation of the environment pursuant to the decisions of relevant international conferences. We need the support of the international community in our endeavours.

Development has become the main preoccupation of the developing and least developed countries. It must be linked to an open and just global trading system within an institutional framework that guarantees unobstructed investment and capital flows, as well as the transfer of technology.

We must develop an international mechanism within the United Nations to address the indebtedness of developing countries.

In our view, there is an inherent link between the maintenance of regional and international peace and security and the process of development and peace-building. Hotbeds of tension and protracted armed conflict in some regions of Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East impede the realization of integrated development. Our international Organization must therefore dedicate more efforts to defusing tensions and to resolving crises by reforming and invigorating the roles of its two primary organs, namely, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

In conclusion, Lebanon is a founding Member of the United Nations and has contributed to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, Lebanon looks forward to playing a distinct role in the regional and international arenas. We are anxious to reconstruct and rehabilitate our vital and civil institutions and productive sectors after the liberation of our land from the Israeli occupation. We in Lebanon are striving for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East that will bring back stability to our region and allow us to play a positive role in building a new world in which we aspire to live.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, His Excellency Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland.

Mr. Jagland (Norway): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of your important position. I would also like to welcome Tuvalu as a new Member of the United Nations.

Norway is committed to a strong and effective United Nations. For decades, we have pursued a policy of translating our commitment to the United Nations into substantial contributions to the various activities of the United Nations system. That is why some 60,000 Norwegians have served in United Nations peacekeeping operations. That is why Norway today contributes 1,500 military and civilian personnel to United Nations and United Nations-mandated peacekeeping operations around the world. That is why we are supporting the peace and reconciliation efforts of the United Nations in the Middle East, Colombia, Cyprus and Sudan. And that is why a relatively small country of 4.5 million inhabitants is one of the largest donors of voluntary contributions to the economic, social and humanitarian programmes of the United Nations. This year, Norway is providing $1.3 billion dollars for development cooperation. My Government plans to increase that amount substantially over the next few years. A large part of that will be channelled through the United Nations system.

At the first session of the General Assembly in the twenty-first century, and after the successful Millennium Assembly last week, it is time to take stock and act upon the decisions we have made. Here is what Norway will give priority to in the time ahead.

We will focus on the root causes of conflict and put the fight against poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation at the top of our agenda.

Financing for development is essential. Norway reached the 0.7 per cent target more than 20 years ago. We are currently devoting 0.9 per cent of our gross national product for official development assistance, and my Government has pledged to reach a full one per cent.

We will increase our support through the multilateral development agencies, including our

support to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We will continue to advocate a more comprehensive approach to peace-building. Conflict prevention, humanitarian relief and long-term development cannot be regarded as separate tasks. They must be part of an integrated and coherent strategy of human security.

We will continue to combat malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases. Malaria alone takes two lives every minute of every day of every year, mainly those of children and pregnant women. We will significantly increase our contribution to the vaccination of children, so that they do not die of easily curable diseases.

We will intensify our efforts to help contain and reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, which in many countries has become the single largest threat to development. We will focus even more strongly on Africa, as Africa needs a new and better deal. We call for a renewed commitment to Africa and are prepared to contribute substantially to this effort.

The United Nations has mounted more peace operations during the last 10 years than during the previous four decades combined. We have witnessed significant successes, but also uncovered disturbing and tragic weaknesses. Far too often — and frequently at great cost to the people we were supposed to protect — the United Nations has relied on last-minute efforts and ad hoc arrangements. The rich and powerful Member States must honour their promises to the weak and defenceless.

Norway supports the recommendations in the report of the United Nations Panel on Peace Operations, headed by Ambassador Brahimi. We stand ready to engage in a broad dialogue on how to ensure the speedy and efficient implementation of the recommendations contained in the Brahimi report.

Together with our partners, we will push forward towards non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We will work for further reductions in nuclear arsenals with a view to eliminating them, building on the important results of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference here in New York.

We will continue to combat illicit trade and the spread of small arms. We should make full use of the opportunity provided by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects to take firm steps to curtail this deadly traffic.

None of this can be done, however, if we do not secure a sound financial basis for the United Nations itself. We must put United Nations finances on a more secure and predictable footing. We must close the gap between the tasks we ask the United Nations to carry out and the resources we make available to it. Zero growth is clearly not sufficient. We cannot expect the United Nations to carry out new and additional tasks without additional funding.

No one must be allowed to commit war crimes or crimes against humanity with impunity. Norway therefore strongly supports the Statute establishing an International Criminal Court. Now we must seek its speedy implementation.

To effectively meet our common challenges, we must build new partnerships between the United Nations, civil society and the private sector. The "Global Compact" is one such initiative. The "Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization" (GAVI) is another. Early next year Norway will host an international conference in Oslo on the role of the private sector in promoting investment and economic development in the least developed countries.

We will continue to support efforts to enable developing countries to take full advantage of the benefits of multilateral cooperation. In particular, we would like to assist the least developed countries — including small island developing States — to benefit more fully from joint international efforts, including the legal regime for the seas and oceans established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Globalization provides opportunities for unprecedented growth, but it can also lead to marginalization and isolation. In our globalized world, markets have become global much faster than politics. There is an urgent need to adapt the international trading and financial systems so that every country can obtain its fair share of the benefits of globalization.

In our shrinking world, providing humanitarian aid and emergency relief to people in need is the responsibility of every Government. Norway will increase its humanitarian efforts — which are already among the most intensive in the world — both

bilaterally and through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations.

We will to the best of our ability continue to facilitate peace efforts in countries where the parties to a conflict request our involvement. Ultimately, however, the responsibility for lasting peace rests with the parties themselves.

Finally, we reiterate our call for reform and enlargement of the Security Council in terms of both permanent and non-permanent members. Broader membership and increased transparency are essential to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Council.

For the first time since 1979, Norway is seeking a seat on the Security Council. We hope to be elected, after 22 years, based on our contributions to the United Nations and on the principles of fair rotation. We therefore ask for the support of the Assembly. Norway will deeply respect a mandate from the Assembly. We will be attentive to its voices and concerns. We will remain committed to help those who suffer from poverty and war, disasters and famine to place a strong United Nations at the centre of world affairs, to ensure that those who have the strongest backs bear the heaviest burden. We ask the Assembly to allow us to serve all Members.

The President: I give the floor to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, His Excellency The Right Honourable Robin Cook.

Mr. Cook (United Kingdom): I am conscious that the central problem for all of us when we rise to speak to the General Assembly is that there are too many issues of concern to hope to address them all in one speech. There is no shortage of challenges to the United Nations as we meet for the first time in a new century to debate the issues of a modern world.

It is a world united by the new technologies of communication. We have never had so much opportunity to share the know-how for economic growth. Yet our world has never before been so divided between rich and poor. In the year ahead, we must make sure that all the United Nations agencies and its international financial institutions work together in a coordinated way to promote development and to reduce debt.

It is also a world bound together by growth in trade between our countries. But we failed at Seattle to make further progress on removing the obstacles to that trade. In the year ahead, we must launch a world trade development round which is fair to those countries whose main exports are agricultural rather than industrial.

It is a world which faces a common threat to its global climate. We are each learning the alarming rate at which that climate is changing as the result of our own actions. Before the end of the year, we must try to reach agreement at the sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to bring into effect the Kyoto measures to stabilize climate change.

Each of these is an important challenge. Each of them is a strategic priority for our work programme for the coming year. This morning, though, I wish to focus my remarks on the central theme of the Millennium Summit and of this fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

How do we equip the United Nations with the capacity in peacekeeping that matches the real demands for it around our world?

In his opening address, the Secretary-General invited us to give a swift response to the Brahimi report on peacekeeping (A/55/305). The United Kingdom is happy to respond to that invitation by offering our support for the report's conclusions and pledging our commitment to its implementation. The report begins by reminding us that the United Nations was founded, in the words of its Charter, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". Too often, though, we have failed to save those who needed our protection from the suffering, the pain and the terror of brutal conflict. We must be frank in facing up to those failures if we are to learn their lessons. And we must be determined to improve the capacity of this Organization to keep the peace if we are to succeed in the future.

I want to set out six tasks which we must address if we are not to repeat past failures. First, we must equip the United Nations with a more effective and more rapid capacity for peacekeeping. In the space of about one year, the number of troops on United Nations peacekeeping missions around the globe has trebled. The United Kingdom has forces operating in eight different theatres where peacekeeping has been authorized by the United Nations.

But it is not the new size of our peacekeeping effort that demands changes. It is the different character of the peacekeeping challenge. It used to be the case that United Nations forces were typically deployed to observe a ceasefire between two States both of which wanted to end the fighting. Today, our peacekeepers are typically deployed within States, not between them, and often where one or more parties to the conflict is not seriously committed to peace. In those circumstances, United Nations peacekeepers need a robust mandate. As the Brahimi report puts it, where one side is violating a peace agreement, treating both sides equally can amount to complicity with evil. United Nations peacekeepers who witness violence against civilians should be presumed to be mandated to halt it.

But if those peacekeepers are to act with determination, then we must equip them with the capacity to do so. The United Nations needs a Headquarters unit capable of rapid deployment within a few weeks, not a few months, of a Security Council resolution. And each of us must develop the number of troops who are trained in the principles and practice of peacekeeping whom we can commit to the United Nations. That is why the United Kingdom has proposed a permanent staff college for United Nations peacekeeping. The United Kingdom has offered to host such a resource for United Nations peacekeeping, if that is welcome to other members of the General Assembly.

The second task is to be more rapid and more imaginative in tackling tension before it results in conflict. By definition, any mission to restore peace is an admission of failure to prevent conflict. As well as coping with the consequences of conflict, we need to address the root causes of conflict: poverty, bad governance and the denial of freedom or of minority rights. I welcome the Secretary-General's intention to submit a report on conflict prevention early next year. It will be a natural companion to the Brahimi report. I hope it can enable us to develop an early warning system which will alert us to potential conflict and give our agencies the chance to offer help before it becomes a real conflict.

Too often, internal conflict is fuelled by the external demand for the illicit trade in diamonds or the evil trade in drugs. Measures to ban conflict diamonds from international sale or to defeat the drugs barons must be key elements of any comprehensive strategy of conflict prevention.

The third task is to take tighter control of the flows of arms which supply conflict. As an international community, we have put much effort into controlling weapons of mass destruction. The good progress we all made at the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) underlines the importance which each of us attaches to this strategic issue. The United Kingdom has ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, has reduced by half its planned strategic nuclear warheads, and has supplied greater transparency on our nuclear arsenal.

Yet, over the past decade, the true weapons of mass destruction have been small arms, which have killed 5 million people in conflicts around the globe. Overwhelmingly, those killed were civilians rather than soldiers. And, overwhelmingly, they were killed in countries which do not manufacture firearms. We must make a success next year of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects. We need to reach agreement to mark firearms at the point of production so that they can be traced. The United Kingdom would support at that conference the presumption that military firearms should not be licensed for sale other than to legitimate Government bodies. And we must seek the help of the international economic agencies, including the World Bank, to fund and to reward with development aid the surrender of firearms.

The fourth task is to provide the United Nations with the civilian resources to promote reconciliation and reconstruction. In Kosovo, and again now in East Timor, we have learned that the end of conflict is only the starting point. When the troops have brought peace, we need judges and administrators to bring justice and development. The peacekeepers must be followed by peace-builders. In particular, we need to muster the civilian police who can establish law and order in place of violence and conflict. I was astonished to read in the Brahimi report that this mighty international organization has only nine civilian police on its Headquarters staff, administering 8,600 civilian police in the field around the world. I am confident that every one of them is the very best, in keeping with the tradition of United Nations staff. But if we are serious about succeeding on the ground, we need a more serious back-up at the centre. Four times in the past

decade, the United Nations has been called upon to undertake a transitional civilian administration. We need a better, permanent, capacity here at the centre to support our operations in the field.

The fifth task is to enforce the international law on crimes against humanity. If we are to have international justice, we must have an international court. The United Kingdom has given strong support to the International Criminal Court, and we have just published our draft legislation to ratify the treaty setting up such a Court. The International Criminal Court will send a strong warning to any future tyrants that they will be called to account for their crimes before the bar of international justice. It will be one of the most powerful advances for human rights since we agreed 50 years ago to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And finally, we must strengthen the authority of the United Nations. In 50 years, there has been no new permanent member of the Security Council. The Security Council needs to represent the world as it is in this century, not the world as it was in the middle of the last century. It needs to be made representative of the 100 or more countries that have joined as Members since the Security Council was set up. The United Kingdom supports a doubling of the permanent membership to include Germany, Japan and three countries from each of the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. We also want more members among those who are elected, in order that the Security Council can be more representative of the General Assembly.

For seven years, we have been debating this question. It is becoming an issue of credibility for the United Nations. How can we pretend to end conflict if we cannot end this disagreement among ourselves? A more representative, modern Security Council would speak with more authority when it challenges those who breach the peace.

I have been frank about where we must improve our capacity for peacekeeping and strengthen our will to halt conflict. But we should not underrate the immense achievement of the United Nations. Our Charter begins by recalling the untold sorrow to mankind inflicted by two world wars. It was a Charter written by ministers and officials determined to end war between States. And in this they were remarkably successful. External aggression between States is now unusual.

But the benefits have been unevenly shared. The industrialized nations have enjoyed half a century of peace. That has provided the security and good order in which their prosperity has advanced at a rate without precedent in history. Yet, in the same half century, people elsewhere in the globe have lived through violence and conflict which have broken their human rights and impoverished their standards of living. It is largely poor countries that now experience the scourge of war which our Charter sought to banish.

The challenge for the United Nations is to ensure that the peace and security which have been enjoyed by many Member States are shared by all. None of us can prevent humanitarian catastrophe by acting alone. But this United Nations can, if we act together.

The Brahimi report tells us what we need to do. As an organization, we publish many reports. Nobody could fault the capacity of the United Nations to produce reports. But we are not always as good at implementing them. Let us make sure that the Brahimi report does not gather dust on library shelves but is put into practice before we meet again next year. Let us show the determination and the conviction that the right in our Charter to be preserved from war is an equal right for the people of all our nations, large and small, rich and poor.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Shalghem, the Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Shalghem (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) *(spoke in Arabic)*: It gives me great pleasure, Sir, to extend to you, on behalf of my country's delegation, our congratulations on your election as President of this session, and to wish you every success in the management of its affairs. I would also like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, who administered the work of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly most competently. I wish also to seize this opportunity to express our gratitude to Secretary General Kofi Annan for his initiatives, which have been instrumental in putting an end to tension in many parts of the world and for his endeavours aimed at reform of the United Nations and the enhancement

of its role, so that it may better fulfil its duties, according to the Charter. A word of welcome is also due to the Republic of Tuvalu, which joined us a few days ago as a new member of the United Nations.

This session is convened in the aftermath of several developments. In the past few days, the Secretary-General submitted "Comprehensive report on peacekeeping operations; it included a number of recommendations that would assist the United Nations in assuming its responsibilities in this field. Furthermore, over the last few months, the General Assembly convened two special sessions, the first conducted a review of the progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the World Conference on Women, and the second reviewed progress in the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and beyond. Last week, this hall witnessed the convening of the Millennium Assembly, at the conclusion of which the leaders of the world expressed their adherence to the United Nations and renewed their commitment to the purposes and principles of its Charter, as well as their intent to lend it their support and to enhance its role to enable it to cope with the new century, with all its changes and challenges. In our view, these developments will undoubtedly contribute to the efforts aimed at achieving the goals of this Organization. However, it must also be noted that we are still far from achieving the ultimate goal for which we strive — namely, the establishment of a world that enjoys peace, security, freedom, equality, and justice, a world free from oppression, acts of aggression, and attempts to impose hegemony and domination.

There are many regions in the world today that suffer from wars and conflicts. Famine and diseases such as cancer, malaria, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) still threaten the lives of millions. Resources provided by nature for the sustenance of life are being seriously endangered. Developing countries have not benefited from the advantages of globalization in a manner proportional to their suffering from its negative impact. In fact, international financial institutions have started to impose severe conditions on these countries to the extent that they find themselves at the mercy of a new form of colonialism. Attempts to intervene in the internal affairs of other States have threatened to eliminate sovereignty — not only to violate it.

There are also unilateral boycott policies and imposition of unjust sanctions, even aggression, under the pretext of so-called international legitimacy. Old ideological barriers have been replaced by new barriers that obstruct the States of the South from access to technology they desperately need for development, and that impose trade protection measures on their products by making other markets inaccessible to them. We are also witnessing selectivity in the sphere of disarmament and double standard policies in the treatment of international issues. Furthermore, criminal activities have increased, including illicit drug trafficking, the financing of organized crime and all kinds of transnational crimes.

Such is the current state of the world, with its various variables and challenges, after the collapse of international equilibrium. Such a state of affairs necessitates the adoption of certain measures to combat and rectify the prevailing conditions. The United Nations, in its capacity as an instrument and reference authority for all, should perform a pivotal role in dealing with these variables. However, we believe that the Organization will not be capable of making an effective contribution in this respect unless radical reforms are introduced into the composition of its organs and the working mechanisms of its entities. In order to guarantee success for this process, we should make it a comprehensive one that takes into account the aspirations, ideas, and proposals of all Member States, big and small, strong and weak. The responsibility for success or failure of this process must ultimately be a joint responsibility.

My country, wishing to contribute to the ongoing efforts aimed at reforming the United Nations, believes that the required reform should achieve the following objectives: first, strengthening the role of the General Assembly so that it becomes the authority responsible for determining and deciding the conditions that must be deemed truly threatening to international peace and security. A mechanism answerable to the General Assembly should be established to ensure the implementation of its resolutions and to enable it to control and hold accountable other United Nations organs, including the Security Council, which itself should be an executive entity for the implementation of General Assembly resolutions.

Secondly, restructuring the Security Council so that it achieves fair geographical representation in its membership, with equity for African, Asian, and Latin

American States that are not fairly represented in the membership of the Council.

Thirdly, improving the ways and methods by which the Security Council conducts its work so that its activities are rendered more transparent. Its rules of procedures should also be reviewed. In fact, the General Assembly, which represents all the Member States of the Organization, should issue such rules, otherwise, it would be meaningless to say that the Council acts on behalf of the international community.

Fourthly, we urge the abolition of the prerogatives that the victors of the Second World War granted to themselves, particularly the right of veto, which should be eliminated because it is non-democratic and undermines the principle of the full equality of Member States, as enshrined in the Charter.

Fifthly, in order to enable the Organization to follow up on its plans and programmes, we propose the establishment of an international committee answerable to the United Nations, with subcommittees that cover most regions of the world, empowered with the necessary mandates and resources to undertake the tasks of inspecting and implementing United Nations programmes.

Despite the problems suffered by many African countries, the current year has witnessed some encouraging developments. In Somalia, Parliament was able to choose a new President for the country and the disputing parties in Burundi signed a national reconciliation agreement. The fighting that broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea has been contained and both sides have signed a ceasefire agreement. These solutions were the fruits of efforts made by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and a number of African leaders who sincerely care for the security, stability and development of the continent. For its part, my country has contributed to all these efforts and will pursue, in cooperation with the OAU and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, our initiatives aimed at securing a just settlement acceptable to all parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone. We will also continue our good offices with the aim of finding a solution to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes region on the basis of the implementation of the Sirte agreement, which was completed in Lusaka, for the purpose of ending the dispute in that region.

From the outset, we in Libya have realized that Africa's problems are partly due to its disunity and the fragmentation of its own peoples' efforts. Therefore, in order for the continent to be truly capable of facing the challenge of disputes, disease and backwardness, as well as others imposed by new international situations, Brother Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi, the leader of the revolution, has pursued his efforts to unify the continent so that it may be ushered into the new century strong and unified. It was in this spirit that a meeting of African foreign ministers was held in Tripoli last April, at which the founding law for the African Union was drafted. This law was approved in Lome last June at the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. At the invitation of the leader of the revolution, the African presidents will meet in Sirte early next year to declare the official establishment of the African Union. This bears witness to the fact that Africa has overcome the negative aspects of the past and realized the dream of unity, which has been the aspiration of African peoples for decades.

All these initiatives and endeavours provide new evidence that Africa fully realizes that the solution to its problems and the advancement of its capacities reside basically in the efforts of its own sons and daughters. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that international peace is indivisible and that international stability cannot be achieved partially. This means that the international community has an obligation to assist Africa in its efforts to realize peace and stability on its soil. As we reiterate today our invitation to all States to help Africa in developing a programme to eliminate epidemics and diseases, provide a solution to the problem of its external debt and ensure that the continent is dealt with on new, just and equitable terms, rather than be considered merely as a consumer market for the products of the industrialized world, we wish to recall, as we have always done, that Africa's problems lie in the abuse of its resources, the plundering of its wealth and riches, intervention in its internal affairs and the imposition of foreign concepts alien to its traditions and culture. We demand that such practices be discontinued, as they constitute one of the main reasons for political instability in many parts of the continent and for economic backwardness in most. We also call upon the States that colonized Africa, drew its borders and scattered and enslaved its people to offer their apologies to the continent and to fully compensate it for all the damage inflicted by colonialism.

No solution has yet been found to the Palestinian question because the essence of this problem has been ignored. My country emphasizes once again that there is no solution to the Palestinian problem other than the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland and the establishment of their State on the land of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital. On this occasion, as we salute the people of Lebanon who, thanks to their steadfastness, were able to defeat the enemy and liberate their occupied land, we once again stress the need for an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights. We also demand the immediate lifting of the sanctions imposed on Iraq and call upon the international community to put an end to the human tragedy endured by that country's people, to preserve the unity and integrity of its territories, to respect its sovereignty, to refrain from interfering in its internal affairs and to cease the military aggression waged daily against it.

The international community has made continuous efforts in the field of disarmament. My country, which is a party to most international conventions in this area, is still fully convinced that some international conventions addressing certain aspects in this field should be reviewed. I would refer, as one example, to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which deals only with simple weapons of limited effect. We, as one of the third world peoples who are incapable of defending our borders and lands against the powerful who possess aircraft carriers and aircraft that refuel in flight, feel that humanity should be preoccupied with the destruction of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as with ballistic weapons, rather concern itself with mines, which are a simple form of weaponry.

On the other hand, we have noticed that a number of obstacles still hinder the efforts to establish a world free of weapons of mass destruction. Those who possess nuclear arms have not yet undertaken actual measures to dispose of their nuclear arsenals. In fact, some of them have continued to develop these weapons vertically, instead of beginning to destroy them. The Israelis, who possess hundreds of nuclear warheads with which they threaten the Arab people from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf, still refuse to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to place their nuclear installations under the supervision and the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In raising this most serious and momentous subject, we are fully convinced that, unless the international community adopts effective measures to force the Israelis to accept and implement the international conventions on nuclear disarmament, and unless the nuclear-weapon States take practical steps to prove the seriousness of their undertakings, efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms will be utterly worthless and any claims concerning the destruction of nuclear arms will be a major act of deception that will not fool the peoples of the world.

Terrorism still constitutes a source of grave danger to humanity, because no effective measures have been taken to trace the roots of this phenomenon in order to eradicate it. My country, which has been a direct victim of state terrorism, has relentlessly reiterated its strong condemnation of terrorist acts and its willingness to cooperate with all international efforts aimed at their elimination. My country's eagerness to put an end to terrorism was so strong that we called in 1992 for the convening of a special session of the General Assembly to consider methods to eradicate all forms of terrorism and violence.

Today, in reiterating this request, it is most important that we clarify that the correct approach to eliminating terrorism must begin with providing a definition for terrorism that is universal, objective, democratic and scientific. It is genuinely unacceptable that some still classify the struggle of peoples for their freedom and the fight of persecuted groups against their persecutors as forms of terrorism, whereas they turn a blind eye to real terrorism, embodied in unjust sanctions, occupation, invasion, foreign military bases, naval fleets, weapons of mass destruction and the use and threat of use of force. Unless all such matters are dealt with, it is certain that any international efforts to eliminate terrorism will be of no avail.

We believe that it has become necessary to take additional measures to reinforce international systems, such as the Statute of the International Criminal Court, concerned with the punishment of perpetrators of the most serious crimes against international security. In its present form, the Statute is designed to try only the weak. We ask that it be modified to guarantee the trial of all perpetrators of acts of aggression, drug smugglers and their trading partners, those responsible

for massacres of innocent people, and those who commit acts of aggression against United Nations troops.

We look forward to the establishment of a world in which equality and justice prevail and which is free from discrimination, oppression and injustice. This will require the drafting of laws that preserve the rights of mother and child and guarantee that a person may own his own house and be a partner in his own productive work, that his basic needs will not be subject to commercialization and that his rights are not usurped as a source of income.

We also look forward to taking practical measures that lead to the realization of a world free from motives of aggression, manifestations of violence, epidemics and diseases. We also hope that efforts will be joined to combat the phenomenon of the "white poisons". Moreover, in order to protect our planet from the dangers that threaten it, we should work to eradicate pests, strive to establish low-cost water desalination systems and seek to prevent the flow of waters of rivers, rain and snow to seas and oceans. Furthermore, all factors that hinder the prevention of desertification and the expansion of agricultural development should be removed. One of these factors is the problem of mines and other remnants of war from which many countries, including my own, still suffer. There are still millions of mines in our lands planted by the fighting forces during the Second World War. We hope that the States responsible for planting these mines will respond to the international decisions that call upon them to make available maps for their locations and to provide technical assistance for their removal.

Allow me now to raise a subject that has preoccupied the attention of the international community for the last seven years, namely the dispute between my country and a number of Western States concerning the Lockerbie incident. I would like to focus on the manner in which the Security Council has dealt with this issue since the suspension of the sanctions in April of last year. As you are well aware, more than a year and a half have now elapsed since the two suspects appeared before the Scottish court convened in the Netherlands. Almost the same period has elapsed since the Secretary-General submitted his report to the Security Council pursuant to resolutions 883 (1993) and 1192 (1998), in which he confirmed that my country has fulfilled the demands stated in the relevant Security Council resolutions. Despite all these developments, however, the Council has been prevented from adopting the resolution that requires the lifting of the sanctions, because of the intransigence of one country, the United States. This intransigence has been such that a threat to use the right of veto was voiced.

The United States gave a number of justifications to prevent the Security Council from lifting the unjust sanctions imposed upon the Libyan people. The first of these justifications is that Libya still supports terrorism. This is a groundless pretext. My country, which was itself a victim of terrorism in 1986 and before, has repeatedly declared its condemnation of international terrorism in all its aspects and forms, and stressed its support for all international efforts aimed at its eradication. Moreover, the Secretary-General's report has given irrefutable proof concerning the vacuity and lack of truth of all American claims that Libya supports terrorism.

The second of these American justifications is that Libya should cooperate with the Scottish court convened in the Netherlands. This is a refutable justification, as my country has pledged from the beginning, that it will cooperate fully with the court. This pledge has, in fact, been proven since the court started reviewing the case. In fact, the United States is the one that has not fully cooperated with the court by hiding basic information requested by the court, which in itself violates Security Council resolutions that call upon all States, and in particular the concerned ones, to cooperate with the Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands.

The third, and the strangest of these justifications, is the demand that Libya pay compensation to the families of the victims of the Pan Am Flight 103. The question to be raised here is: How could the United States ask for compensation while the Scottish court has not yet reached a verdict? Does this not constitute a complete disregard for the legal principle that stipulates a presumption of innocence until the accused is proven guilty? Furthermore, why does the United States jump to conclusions and deliver a ready conviction, while acquittal or conviction is a matter for the court alone to decide? Libya's fulfilment of its obligations was confirmed by the Secretary- General's report a year and a half ago. It was also reaffirmed by the decisions of the Summit of the Organization of African Unity, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Arab

League and lastly the Group of 77 and China, which called for a complete lifting of the unjust sanctions imposed on the Libyan people.

In view of all of the above, my country demands the following:

First, this issue should not politicize, as it has now become a legal matter that should be left to the discretion of the Scottish court convened in the Netherlands without interference from any parties.

Secondly, the Security Council should, as early as possible, adopt a resolution under which the sanctions imposed on the Libyan people are fully and irrevocably lifted. This is the only procedure that reaffirms the commitment of the Council to paragraph (16) of its resolution 883 (1993), and the second paragraph of its resolution 1192 (1998). It would also reaffirm the Council's response to the wishes of the absolute majority of the international community, on whose behalf the Council is supposed to work.

Should the Council be further hindered from adopting the required resolution, my country will have no choice but to resort to this august Assembly so it could take the necessary measures to vindicate us vis-à-vis one State that refuses to lift the sanctions, a State that was behind the imposition of these sanctions in the first place.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Joschka Fischer, Deputy Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany.

Mr. Fischer (Germany) (*spoke in German; English text furnished by the delegation*): First of all I would like to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and wish you every success with your work. I would like to thank Foreign Minister Gurirab for his dedication in chairing the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I welcome Tuvalu as the one hundred and eighty-ninth member of the United Nations and congratulate it on its accession. I endorse the statement of my French colleague, Hubert Védrine, on behalf of the European Union.

At this session of the General Assembly, the first in the new millennium, we are asked to determine the future tasks of the United Nations and which reforms are necessary in order to master them. The Millennium Declaration, which we all adopted on 8 September, shows us the way forward. The implementation of this Declaration should be a main focus of the consultations of this and future sessions of the General Assembly. I propose that the Secretary-General make use of the opportunity to draw up review reports at the beginning of the next session of the General Assembly.

There was one issue in particular which dominated this debate, namely globalization. It will radically change the economy and finances, politics and culture everywhere. The question is, will a new order which guarantees peace, justice and an equal share in our common progress be established or will a new divide evolve in the world? Will the future of the globalized world manifest its pluralist character in a multilateral order? Only the future can provide the answers to these questions.

Particularly for developing countries, globalization offers great opportunities. If it nevertheless provokes strong opposition, this lies in the imbalances of this historical process. Indeed, just under a decade after the end of the cold war, our world is today at risk from a new divide, one between the winners and losers of the economic globalization process. In his impressive Millennium Report, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, rightly highlights the growing inequalities in the distribution of income, resources, investments and access to new technologies.

In view of this situation, the international community must make every effort in the coming decade to ensure that globalization benefits all peoples. If market forces are not balanced by a political corrective mechanism, it is to be expected that injustice in the world will increase further. Those who have been hitherto excluded from the advantages of globalization must be included to a greater extent. They must be given more say in the political decisions made about steering global processes and they must be given an opportunity to gain a fairer share in the development of the world economy.

In the twenty-first century, we will, more than ever before, need a form of global governance if we are to solve global challenges. The United Nations will play a key role here. It is the only organization within which the injustice between rich and poor can be overcome and where a reconciliation between peoples and regions, global peace and sustainable development can be achieved.

Greatly strengthening the United Nations capacity to act is, therefore, a crucial question for the whole of

humanity in the twenty-first century. In addition to the crucial reform of the Security Council, this will entail the United Nations entering into creative partnerships with industry and civil society.

Germany strongly supports the Secretary-General's idea for a global compact with major companies. The German initiative for a resolution in the General Assembly on global partnerships will take up this and other issues relating to the globalization process.

Global poverty is the key problem in North-South relations. It lies at the root of many global risks and threats to peace. The Secretary-General provided precise and stimulating analyses of this in his report.

The industrialized nations have a special obligation to support the poorest of the poor. With the Cologne debt initiative launched by Germany, we are combining debt relief with a strategy to combat poverty. The 20 poorest developing countries should be debt-free by the end of the year.

The least developed countries should be granted access to world markets with the greatest possible exemption from duties and quotas. We must, also by way of liberalization steps in the World Trade Organization, prevent these countries from being socially excluded even further.

This applies in particular to the new economy. The United Nations and its Member States must intensify their efforts to make it easier for these countries to use the information and communication technologies. This is contingent upon initiatives in the field of education, as well as the availability of the necessary resources.

However, how can poor countries ever catch up economically if they are, at the same time, afflicted to a much greater degree than the North by terrible diseases? The fight against the disastrous spread of the AIDS virus, particularly in Africa, must be priority for us all. The focus must be on prevention. At the same time, access to medicines must be improved and vaccine research must be intensified. The World Bank's promising idea of establishing a future fund for the purchase of vaccines deserves every support. Particularly in the fight against AIDS, new partnerships between Governments and companies are crucial.

The second major issue of this General Assembly is peacekeeping. The Secretary-General showed the way ahead with the Brahimi report. The recommendations it contains should be examined and implemented as quickly as possible. Germany will play its part. Peace missions need a more robust mandate, as well as more personnel and equipment. Member States must do considerably more to ensure the rapid secondment of well-trained troops, police officers and civilian experts. The further development of the police concept is one of the most important tasks in this connection — as the last few months and years have, in fact been teaching us.

The German Government will offer German training for civilian peace-mission personnel and offer civilian capacities to the United Nations stand-by system. In addition, we are drafting a plan for training civilian experts for peace missions, thus creating a pool of qualified personnel who can be deployed at short notice.

The prevailing form of conflict today is conflict within States. Therefore the main task of peacekeeping must be to address the internal roots of conflicts. In addition to focusing on an improvement in socio-economic conditions, our efforts must focus on promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, aptly said that the human rights violations of today are the wars of tomorrow.

Numerous concrete tasks are on the agenda. The protocols relating to the involvement of children in armed conflict and to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography must enter into force as early as possible. The equality of women must be advanced in all spheres. I call upon all states to ratify quickly the new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to abolish all laws that discriminate against women by 2005. The World Conference against racism, to be held in 2001, must tackle all aspects of this issue. Out of a sense of responsibility for our history, our State and our society will stand up firmly against all forms of right-wing radicalism, racism and anti-Semitism, both in our own country and in the world.

I call upon all States to respect the integrity of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, to sign and to ratify it, so that the Court can commence work soon. There can be no exceptions to the Rome Statute.

One of the greatest dangers facing humanity remains the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The risk of regional arms races, particularly in South Asia, has increased. Further developing the international arms-control regime therefore continues to be one of the United Nations key tasks. This will require resolute implementation of the results of the sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Against this background, President Clinton's decision not to commit now to the development of a national missile defence system is very welcome. The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty must remain as a cornerstone of strategic stability and the basis for further nuclear-disarmament measures.

In poor countries the excessive stockpiling of small arms must be stopped. We must therefore do everything we can to achieve tangible progress at the United Nations small arms conference to be held in 2001. This presupposes the inclusion of all aspects, including the legal transfer of production and stockpiles.

Regional cooperation has proved to be an extremely effective means of preventing conflicts. The United Nations can do much to help here. Allow me to mention two regions where progress is particularly urgent. The triangle between Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East is full of destabilizing factors — oil, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, drugs and the nuclear arms race — and this area is threatening to become the crisis region of the century ahead. A new comprehensive regional process, along the lines of the Helsinki model, which fosters cooperation instead of confrontation, could play an important stabilizing role. Germany is prepared to take part in such a process.

In Africa, regional approaches have gained in significance. In the main, however, it is, unfortunately, too early to talk of effective peacekeeping structures. Unfortunately, the efforts on the part of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity to resolve the conflicts in the Congo and Sierra Leone have not achieved a breakthrough so far. In the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea it is to be hoped that the ceasefire that has finally been concluded will be consolidated and that the United Nations peace mission will be lent the full support of the parties to the conflict.

The third issue, protection of our natural environment, will probably become the crucial issue affecting our planet. In the course of the twentieth century the world's population quadrupled, while consumption of energy and raw materials increased tenfold. We must end the squandering of natural resources and switch to renewable energy sources as quickly as possible. This cannot only be a matter for industrialized nations. We are witnessing at this very moment what a burden high oil prices places on poor countries in particular. It must be in the interest of all States to bring about the transition from the oil to the hydrogen age as quickly as possible. The most important thing now is to finally overcome the deadlock in the climate-protection negotiations and to ensure that the Kyoto Protocol can be implemented by 2002, 10 years after the Rio Summit.

Another key issue for humanity, the future of genetic engineering, can only be mastered within the framework of a global consensus. Genetic engineering has the potential to revolutionalize medicine and agriculture. At the same time, it raises more ethical and human rights questions than any other technology. Do we not need clear, binding rules for dealing with such a powerful new technology? Why do we not seriously consider within the United Nations creating under international law a convention that meaningfully promotes genetic engineering and safeguards the freedom to research and the findings of this research, while, at the same time, defining an ethical basis and guaranteeing protection against abuse?

The Millennium Declaration points the way ahead. But what help will that be if an increasing number of Members allow the world's real problems to be dealt with and decided somewhere else? If we do not succeed in adapting the United Nations to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century and in modernizing it fully, it will be sidelined, with fatal consequences for peace and development, human rights, the environment and social progress.

We will all, rich and poor, lose out.

We must therefore muster the strength to resolutely implement the Millennium Declaration. We need a world Organization that is strong and we must use its scarce resources more effectively. An important prerequisite for this is that the United Nations be placed finally on a solid financial footing. Together with its European Union partners, Germany has put

forward proposals for a fairer, more balanced scale of assessments, which must continue to be based on Member States' ability to pay.

The Security Council no longer reflects the political reality of our world at the dawn of the new millennium. We share the Secretary-General's view that this central steering organ of the international community must become more representative, legitimate and effective, also involving the developing countries. Last week Chancellor Schroeder reaffirmed Germany's willingness to take on more responsibility in this connection. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my friend and colleague Robin Cook for the clear language that he used before the General Assembly just a few minutes ago.

The General Assembly must structure its work, debate global problems in a more focused fashion than hitherto and identify courses of action. The synergetic potential between United Nations organizations, for example in the environmental field, must be better used and resources pooled to a greater extent by merging organizations.

Reform of the United Nations will play a decisive role in ensuring that the twenty-first century is safer and more just than the twentieth century. Allow me to conclude with a quote from the Secretary-General's Millennium Report:

> "No shift in the way we think or act can be more critical than this: we must put people at the centre of everything we do ... Only when that begins to happen will we know that globalization is indeed becoming inclusive, allowing everyone to share its opportunities." (*A/54/2000, para. 16*)

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Farouk Al-Shara' *(spoke in Arabic)*: It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of this General Assembly session. We are confident that the posts you have assumed in your country and the international respect that you enjoy will facilitate the task entrusted to you in leading the deliberations of this session of the General Assembly to their desired objectives.

I would also like to express our appreciation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia for his efforts in leading the work of the previous session to a successful conclusion. I would be remiss if I failed to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts to maintain the principles and purposes of the Charter and for the distinguished role he has played in crystallizing the idea of convening the Millennium Summit last week. It was indeed an unusual event in United Nations history.

The historic Millennium Summit Declaration confirmed unequivocally and clearly the commitment of all the Heads of State and Government of the world to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. We believe that the absence of any substantial difference between the Charter and the Declaration is an important achievement in itself. The historic Declaration issued by the Millennium Summit may be considered, in one way or another, as a renewed vote of confidence in the Charter, particularly, as the world has recently witnessed major changes and dangerous challenges. One may therefore conclude that the principles and purposes adopted by peoples and nations do not undergo major changes with the passage of time.

It would be wrong to underestimate the significance of this conclusion for the history of the United Nations. The end of the cold war did not prevent the peoples and nations of the world from denouncing and condemning crimes of aggression, ethnic-cleansing, foreign occupation, oppression, extremism, injustice, corruption, racism and double standards. Nor did this make us hesitate to glorify many noble objectives, such as freedom, peace, equality, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and social justice.

It is fortunate that third world countries and poor countries host large populations with bountiful resources and great heritage. This constitutes a safety net for those countries that were able to contribute to maintaining the principles and purposes of the United Nations when drafting the Millennium Declaration. This explains the lack of any reference to the new world order, either in the Millennium Summit Declaration or in any other official text. Regrettably, however, this becomes evident in reality, whereby hegemony seems to have the upper hand in the international arena.

Strengthening the role of the United Nations was the main topic on the Summit's agenda. This role would also become clear in reforming the Security

Council and expanding its membership. The United Nations membership considers the Council the Organization's primary organ. This reform process should be accomplished by expanding the Security Council membership, the granting of equitable and fair geographical representation and the gradual phasing out of the use of the right of veto, which contradicts the concept of democracy, particularly when its aim is nothing short of undermining the democratic process.

United Nations peacekeeping operations have contributed to creating conditions conducive to ending the deterioration of security conditions in many countries of the world. Throughout the past years, the Syrian Arab Republic has done everything it could to preserve the security and safety of United Nations peacekeeping personnel and to ensure that they successfully carry out their missions and mandates. But peacekeeping operations must be confined to enforcing United Nations resolutions and those of international legitimacy. The Security Council has therefore to enforce its resolutions so that peacekeeping operations will not simply become operations to impose the status quo, which makes the achievement of true peace a very elusive objective.

The peace process launched in Madrid has been losing its momentum, incentive and compass, day after day and year after year. The Security Council, which has the authority and international legitimacy to enforce its own resolutions, has been kept out of the Middle East peace process. It has become a silent witness to the fact that the peace process in the Middle East has reached a dead end.

It has become quite obvious to all those involved in the peace process, both inside and outside our region, that continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories — which is sometimes explained by Israel's psychological need for security and at other times by superstitious myths — is the major obstacle on the road to peace. Those futile claims, which have no foundation in reality whatsoever, have caused the peace process to become an endless negotiating process with neither end nor resolution in sight.

At any rate, the serious and carefully considered negotiations that Syria has conducted have proven to the international community at large, and to Arabs in particular, two main things: first, that Israel is neither desirous of, nor serious about, pursuing a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with United Nations resolutions; and, secondly, that Syria has the right to a full return of the entire Golan, to the 4 June 1967 line, without concessions or compromises.

We would like to mention another fact known to our foes and friends alike. That fact is that Syria has unreservedly supported every Arab and Palestinian right during every stage of the peace talks. It did not take those positions to embarrass anyone or to negotiate on their behalf. As a matter of principle, Syria has been, and continues to be, committed to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to return to their lands, to self-determination, and to establish their independent State on their national soil. On that basis, Syria presented its position clearly and firmly at the meeting of the Jerusalem Committee that was convened in Morocco at the end of last month in support of the rights of Muslims and Arabs to full and uncompromised Palestinian sovereignty over Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The Arabs are an ancient and time-honoured nation known for its religious tolerance. But tolerance is one thing and conceding one's rights is something else. Territory and sovereignty are matters of national dignity that can never be forfeited or compromised.

At the Millennium Summit, the countries of the world expressed their belief that we live today in an age of international law and under the United Nations Charter, international legitimacy and human rights, and not in an age of the law of the jungle and futile religious claims to justify the usurpation of other peoples' land by force. This requires from the international community and the United Nations a more firm and non-selective stand in defending the Charter and international law and in prompting Israel to respect international legitimacy and international conventions and to implement the resolutions of the United Nations.

The brotherly Lebanese people have achieved a historic milestone, thanks to their solidarity and that of their State, in strongly resisting Israeli occupation. Syria stood by Lebanon firmly in order to ensure the full implementation of resolution 425 (1978). Syria will always stand by Lebanon and support all its national issues, especially the ones concerning the return of all its territory and the return of its hostages held in Israeli jails. In this regard, we urge the donor countries to fulfil their commitments to help Lebanon rebuild what Israel has destroyed, particularly the

damage it caused during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

From this international forum, Syria would like once again to stress the great importance it attaches to maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq. We call for relieving the suffering of the Iraqi people by lifting the economic sanctions that only affect the people. We also stand against any measures taken against Iraq outside the context of United Nations resolutions so that those resolutions will retain the necessary credibility to bring about their implementation.

We also deem it necessary to find a just and humane solution to the question of Kuwaiti and other prisoners of war, within a practical framework agreed upon between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi sides. We do not want the issue of prisoners of war and missing persons to remain outside the human and political framework that will allow us to arrive at a solution.

Syria also calls upon the Security Council to quickly and permanently lift the sanctions it imposed against Libya. Libya has delivered on all its commitments under Security Council resolutions. We fully support Libya's demands.

In view of the strong, brotherly relations between Syria, the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran, we call upon the two neighbouring countries to pursue negotiations to resolve peacefully the dispute over the three islands on the basis of the principles of good neighbourliness and mutual respect. Syria believes that the establishment of a trilateral committee to pave the way for direct negotiations between Iran and the United Arab Emirates through the creation of favourable conditions is a practical initiative. We hope that it will allow the two parties to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

We would like to welcome the achievements of the representatives of Somalia in forming a temporary Somali parliament and electing Mr. AbdiKassim Salad Hassan as President of democratic Somalia. We consider these achievements as major pillars for the restoration of Somali State institutions. We call upon the international community to redouble its efforts to help Somalis carry out the tasks of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The continued tragic situation in Afghanistan is a source of great concern to us. We are convinced that the problem of Afghanistan can only be solved by stopping the fighting and beginning negotiations aimed at achieving national reconciliation. It must also be solved by finding an acceptable and permanent political settlement that brings about security and stability for the Afghan people. Many Arab and Islamic countries fear that continued and senseless fighting in Afghanistan may lead to undermining the concept of the State in that country and to destroying its heritage and whatever is left of its historic traditions.

Syria welcomes the discussions convened at the highest level in Pyongyang in June 2000. We express the hope that this rapprochement between the two Koreas will contribute to achieving the aspirations of the Korean people in reunifying the peninsula through peaceful means.

There was a consensus in the statements delivered at the Millennium Summit and in the Summit Declaration about the need to exert all possible efforts to rid humanity of the humiliating and inhumane conditions of extreme poverty, in which more than a billion people live. The Summit stressed the commitment of Member States to basic human rights, as well as to the right of every country to development. We think this will require developing a new economic international order that is just, fair and democratic. It will also require finding a multilateral commercial and financial system characterized by transparency, equality and non-discrimination. We must also find the best mechanism possible to solve developmental problems, especially on the African continent. Such a system should also give preferential treatment to developing countries in order to facilitate investment and the transfer of technology and know-how. That would allow for full, effective and equal participation by the South in the process of decision-making at the international level. Although these requests seem far-fetched now, they will in the final analysis serve all parties and States, whether they be rich or poor, in the North or in the South.

We had fervently hoped that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East would have been achieved by the beginning of the twenty-first century and with the ushering in of this new millennium. Nonetheless, we remain optimistic. Peace will remain our strategic choice and that of all peoples who aspire to a bright future in which peace, security and prosperity prevail for human beings everywhere.

The President: As members can see, we are making good progress this morning as far as the list of speakers is concerned, and there will be some time remaining. In view of this, Bosnia and Herzegovina has agreed to be the last speaker at this meeting.

I now give the floor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, His Excellency Mr. Brian Cowen.

Mr. Cowen (Ireland): Your election, Sir, as President of the Millennium Assembly is fitting recognition of your great dedication to international peace. Ireland is especially grateful for your outstanding contribution to the Good Friday agreement signed in Belfast in 1998. We are sure that the qualities that you displayed then will serve you well in guiding the work of this session.

Our thanks are due also to Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia, the wise and thoughtful President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. We are happy also to welcome Tuvalu as a new Member of the Organization.

My colleague, Foreign Minister Védrine of France, has already addressed the Assembly on behalf of the European Union. Ireland is fully associated with his remarks.

The Declaration adopted at the historic Millennium Summit sets out the principles, objectives and targets which should inspire the work of this session. Ireland is fully committed to these principles and objectives, and we are determined to work vigorously to achieve real results. Critics of the United Nations may doubt our ability to achieve such results; we are determined to prove them wrong. Such critics ignore the considerable achievements of the Organization in recent years. Major reform of all aspects of the Organization has resulted in a more efficient, streamlined operation. We will work with others to strengthen the United Nations in order to fulfil the commitment made in the Declaration — to ensure a more effective instrument for pursuing the fight for peace and development and against poverty, ignorance and disease.

The cause of peace transcends all other challenges. Whether in the Middle East, the Western Balkans, Africa or, indeed, in our own island of Ireland, determined efforts to build a secure and durable peace must be tirelessly pursued. Our own experience in Ireland has taught us that there is no greater prize, no more difficult task and no greater satisfaction than to begin to heal the wounds of history and the scars of intolerance.

Our own efforts at building peace have convinced us that to be effective, such efforts require international support and validation. We have also learned that economic development goes hand in hand with building a society with hope in its own future and pledged to overcome the bitterness of the past. It is this experience which helps guide our approach to peace-building in the wider world. It is this experience of peace-building and development which we will bring to the deliberations of the Security Council if elected by the membership in the coming weeks.

Security and development are indivisible and interrelated. Yet too often we in the international community stand aside as hapless witnesses, hesitating to become involved, while the innocent suffer. We need to strengthen the capacity and commitment of the Organization to fulfil its mandates. I therefore strongly welcome the exercise of its authority by the United Nations in East Timor last year and, more recently, in Sierra Leone. It is our duty as Governments to underpin that authority.

We must address those issues which prolong conflict, even when root causes become blurred. Let me give two examples. First, the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons into areas of conflict must be stopped; and secondly, trafficking in high-value commodities, particularly the trade in so-called "blood diamonds", which has exacerbated conflicts in Africa, must be prevented. Carefully targeted, time-limited sanctions will help to counter this menace.

Enhancing the role of the United Nations in peacekeeping is a priority for this session. To broaden that role, we urge an integrated approach combining prevention, settlement and post-conflict peace-building. While the Security Council has a global remit to maintain international peace and security in every region of the world, it is right that it pay special attention at this time to the promotion of durable peace in Africa. We therefore welcome the declared intention of the Security Council at the Millennium Summit to ensure that it plays a more effective role in this urgent and necessary task.

Peacekeeping is at the heart of Ireland's contribution to the United Nations. For more than 40 years we have participated continuously in United

Nations peacekeeping operations. Irish personnel have served under United Nations command in the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe. We are proud of the contribution which our peacekeepers have made in so many areas of the world. At the same time, we deeply regret that 82 of our Irish soldiers have died in the service of the United Nations. Other Member States have also sustained losses, and I would like to express my deep regret at the brutal attack last week on United Nations personnel in West Timor as well as at the recent outrages in Sierra Leone.

It is because of our own long, and at times frustrating, experience of peacekeeping that Ireland welcomes the publication of the Brahimi report. In the light of this experience, I will focus in particular on three aspects.

First, the United Nations must have the resources and capacity to deliver well-planned and effective peace support operations. The Member States must give the Secretary-General and his staff the means to do the job.

Secondly, if the United Nations is to save lives, it must be capable of deploying into conflict areas rapidly. This requires rapid decision-making.

Thirdly, effective operations depend on well-trained peacekeepers. A more integrated approach must be taken to develop training and equipment of United Nations peacekeeping personnel. Ireland's own United Nations Training School has provided such training to over 170 officers from 40 countries, and we intend to enhance this role in cooperation with like-minded countries.

To those ends, we will contribute actively in this Assembly to the urgent follow-up of the proposals that have been put forward.

Progress in disarmament remains crucially important both to the maintenance of peace and to development. At the sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, very considerable efforts were made by all the States parties to ensure a successful outcome. That reflects the central role of the Treaty in the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. The outcome highlights the underlying premise of the Non-Proliferation Treaty: that these weapons do not provide assurances of peace and security. The threat to humanity posed by their continued existence will remain until we achieve an effective and global ban.

There have been welcome and significant reductions by the nuclear-weapon States of their arsenals. But defence strategies based on nuclear weapons continue to include the possible use, even the first use, of those weapons. The Non-Proliferation Treaty is not a charter for the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons by any State. It represents a clear obligation to make nuclear disarmament a reality. At the Review Conference, the parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty came closer in their common understanding of what is demanded by the Treaty. In that connection, the unequivocal commitment to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons made by the nuclear-weapon States is of fundamental significance.

However, let us not lull ourselves into complacency because we have reached agreement on a programme of action. We now have an opportunity to begin the root-and-branch elimination of these weapons. Progress is primarily dependent on action by the five nuclear-weapon States. States which participate in security arrangements involving nuclear weapons have a particular responsibility to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security policies. All States share a responsibility to advance negotiation on those measures needed to guarantee a world free of nuclear weapons. For our part, Ireland and our partners in the New Agenda Coalition are determined to work vigorously for the achievement of that goal.

I referred earlier to the role of conventional arms in conflict situations. The ravages and suffering caused by small arms as well as by landmines are immense. We are, at least in the case of landmines, beginning to see positive results from the implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The practical outcome has been the destruction of over 22 million mines by some 50 States; expenditure on mine clearance has more than doubled, and countless lives have been saved.

Next year, the United Nations will focus on small arms with the first international conference specifically addressing that issue. We must set ambitious goals for the conference so that we may have a basis for making genuine inroads on the culture of violence fostered by the dissemination of those weapons.

Peace and development are essential to each other. Without peace, there can be no development. Without development, peace is hard to sustain. Without freedom from the threat of war, from human rights abuse and from famine, there can be no lasting human progress. The elimination of poverty and access to basic health care and education are crucial to sustainable development. Nonetheless, we witness today an unprecedented contrast between the prosperity of developed countries and the poverty of those that have been left behind. And yet, at the same time, we are witnessing an actual decline in the international community's development aid levels. Clearly, that trend must be reversed.

It has long been an objective of Irish Governments to bring our development cooperation effort into line with our national economic growth and to meet the United Nations development cooperation target. Last week our Government took an important step forward by when our Taoiseach, our Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, speaking at the Millennium Summit, committed Ireland to meet the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product by the end of 2007, and to reach the level of 0.45 per cent by the end of 2002. This will clearly represent a significant increase in volume terms. Indeed, in meeting our targets, we anticipate a fourfold increase by Ireland in our aid over the next seven years. That will greatly increase our ability to make a real impact on the lives of some of the poorest people on earth. Our aid budget is both a test and a reflection of our commitment to the values and principles set out in the Millennium Summit Declaration. We shall not fail in this task we have set ourselves as a country: to be an example to all who could contribute more.

As we enter the new millennium, we are faced with several development issues which require immediate attention. We must begin to address the question of debt relief in a more coherent manner. The most heavily indebted countries need a sound basis for the achievement of acceptable levels of growth free from grinding debt. We must recognize that the burden on those States is unsustainable in the face of the challenges of poverty alleviation and AIDS.

Speed is essential in delivering results from the Enhanced Debt Initiative if it is to remain credible. In addition to a European Union contribution of almost $1 billion, Ireland has bilaterally contributed over $40 million in debt relief, although as a matter of principle we have never extended loans in the guise of development assistance. That is why our aid has always been in grant form, and why all of our development aid is also untied.

Greater market access by the least developed countries must be a priority. With the early implementation of the European Union's commitment to grant duty-free and quota-free access to its market by the least developed countries by 2005, a major step in this direction will have been taken.

One of the greatest challenges to development is HIV/AIDS. If the spread of AIDS is to be arrested, we need: strong political will in the leadership of the most affected countries; we need greater international resources; we need greater access to essential drugs at prices that are affordable; and we need more research funds for the development of vaccines. The fight against AIDS is now an integral part of all Irish development activities, with funding budgeted for both prevention and the search for vaccines.

Respect for human rights is central to the maintenance of peace and the promotion of development. It underpins all the activities of the United Nations. Putting weapons in the hands of children and sending them into conflict undermines the most basic rights and the innocence of the child. That is a scandal which cannot be allowed to continue. Through the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, which Ireland was among the first to sign, a start has been made in addressing this issue. But much more must be done.

The establishment of an International Criminal Court offers a unique opportunity to bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international law. Ireland is moving rapidly to ratify the Statute. The international criminal tribunals for former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda demonstrate how necessary it is to exercise international jurisdiction to end the culture of impunity where violations of basic human rights occur.

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance persist in all our societies. The 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance will provide an opportunity to create a vision for the fight against racism and all intolerance for the coming century. I pay tribute here to the United Nations High Commissioner

for Human Rights, Mary Robinson. Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, TD, our Prime Minister, was pleased to be amongst the first to sign the declaration entitled: "Tolerance and diversity: a vision for the twenty-first century", which was presented at the Millennium Summit. I believe that it will generate a positive approach to the World Conference.

I know that our friends in the international community continue to follow developments in the peace process in Ireland with close interest. Indeed, the Governments of many Member States have played an important and concrete part in the successes we have achieved to date. I am particularly pleased therefore to be able to report that in the past year, in the face of many difficulties, we have made real progress towards the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

The new political institutions are up and working well. In Northern Ireland there is an Executive on which all parts of the community — nationalist, unionist and republican — are represented as of right, and where Ministers are working constructively together to improve the quality of life for all the people. The North/South Ministerial Council, which brings together Ministers from both jurisdictions on the island, and the Implementation Bodies which it oversees, are developing new ways of working together, delivering tangible benefits in areas of mutual importance and interest. In the British-Irish Council, we are forging new relationships, including with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

We are firmly committed to ensuring that all other aspects of the Agreement are implemented in full.

Policing reform is a vital part of the new dispensation we are striving to create in Northern Ireland. All sides of the community want to see an effective, accountable policing service to which they can give allegiance and which young people, whatever their background, can join. The Agreement promised a new beginning in this area, and the Patten Report set out how it can be achieved. It is now crucially important that the legislative proposals currently before Parliament at Westminster secure that outcome.

The Agreement also contains extensive commitments in the area of human rights, and we are working to ensure that they are delivered. My Government has established an independent Human Rights Commission, with a mandate and remit that surpass the standards set in the Paris Principles. We are in the process of appointing its members. We look forward to the Commission working closely with its counterpart in the North for the protection and promotion of human rights throughout the island of Ireland.

We also need to see continued progress towards security and justice arrangements appropriate to a society in which peace will become the norm, and to see the question of arms resolved for all time. To this end, we have made great strides forward in recent months.

Our task in the peace process has always been more than the putting in place of a new set of institutions and arrangements, important though they undoubtedly are. We are endeavouring to create a new beginning for what has been a deeply divided society, a new beginning where the divisions of the past are overcome. The task which the Irish Government has set itself is to work with others in peace and partnership, and in a spirit of mutual tolerance and respect, building together a better future for all of the people of Ireland. This demands patience, persistence and perseverance. A great deal remains to be done.

Far too many people continue to have their lives blighted by sectarianism and hatred. There are still those who prefer to foster division, retarding rather than advancing the cause of reconciliation. On both sides there are still small groups of dissidents prepared to use violence to bring down the Agreement and to frustrate the democratically expressed wishes of the people. They have nothing to offer, and they will not be allowed to succeed.

In Northern Ireland many people have yet to experience the full benefits of change and the return of hope and normality to their lives. Some remain sceptical about the benefits of the Agreement. But, working together with the British Government and with the representatives of all sides of the community, we will continue to do all in our power to convince them that the Agreement represents not only a balanced and honourable accommodation, but also the only way forward.

The international community has made an important contribution to our achievements to date. Without the support and encouragement of the international community, we could not have come so far. When we embarked on our journey towards peace, we knew that it would take a great deal of time and of

work to see the Agreement implemented in full. We remain firmly committed to the task and take heart from the substantial progress we have made and draw courage from the international community's continued support.

In the course of my statement I have set out my Government's position on the key issues facing the United Nations. It is this approach and commitment that will inform our actions if we are elected to the Security Council. Ireland is standing for election after 20 years absence from the Council. We do so as a small State which has already made a significant contribution to the work of this Organization. Faithful to the principles and purposes of the Charter, we have faced and tried to overcome the legacies of strife and underdevelopment that have marked our own history. Membership of the Security Council will allow us to bring to the service of all the lessons of our own experience, as well as our full commitment to the United Nations.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Anna Lindh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

Ms. Lindh (Sweden): The individual human being must always be at the centre of our work. Burmese students fighting for democracy, victims of ethnic violence in Kosovo, women in Afghanistan denied their right to education and equality, children dying of curable diseases, people simply trying to survive in the utmost poverty — have given us our task. Meeting the needs of the peoples and realizing their aspirations remain the starting point, the purpose and the vision of our Organization.

But the United Nations will only be what we, its Members, allow it to be. This year's General Assembly session provides an occasion to revitalize our much needed, but often criticized, global Organization. The Secretary-General's excellent report on the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century provides a firm basis for the creation of a truly modern United Nations — a United Nations with maintained legitimacy and increased credibility, greater efficiency and continued global relevance.

Globalization opens the market for those who have the resources and instruments to benefit from it. Globalization makes knowledge and information available to those who have the tools and skills to make use of the new technology. Globalization brings opportunities to improve life for all people, but it has also led to an increasing gap between those who can take advantage and those left behind.

Safeguarding the universal and indivisible rights and values of humanity is a key responsibility for the United Nations in the age of globalized economy, technology and communications.

The world community has to do its utmost to integrate the least developed countries into the global economy. Solidarity and responsibility from all countries are necessary for reaching international development targets and for contributing to an improved standard of living for all people. Solidarity and responsibility are essential in fighting two of the greatest threats to development and human security in our time: poverty and HIV/AIDS. We need to work with a wide range of measures to overcome these threats.

Sustained and increased official development assistance remains of vital importance. Today only four countries, Sweden among them, meet the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income in development aid.

But we must also look at financing for development in a broader perspective. Domestic resources, trade, international finance and official development assistance must all be taken into account. Sweden wants an integrated approach to development. We welcome the fact that the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and others are working together in preparing next year's high-level events on these issues.

The start of new negotiations under the WTO can be an important contribution to growth and development. Let us together make sure that such negotiations truly turn into a development round. The major trading nations have already committed themselves to giving free market access to products from the least developed countries. It is time to put these commitments into effect.

There is no contradiction between development and respect for human rights. On the contrary, development benefits from respect for the human rights and participation of all citizens, and discrimination and oppression are threats to development. For women in many parts of the world, discrimination means being

excluded from participation in the economic and political fields; their potential contribution is lost. Two-thirds of all illiterates are women. For millions of women, domestic violence is a daily reality. This is not in accordance with the basic values of our international community and it is a major obstacle to sustainable development. The legal basis for ending discrimination exists with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the new agreement of the special session in June.

For the children, next year's special session of the General Assembly provides an excellent opportunity to set a global and concrete agenda. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the basis for this agenda to reduce forcefully maternal mortality, to give more children access to primary school and to promote the participation of young people in shaping our societies. Girls must be given the same rights and opportunities as boys. I thus welcome the Secretary-General's new system-wide girls' education initiative.

A growing problem in many countries and regions is the traffic in human beings, especially exposing women and children to sexual exploitation and to forced labour. These criminal acts call for our immediate attention and a forceful reaction from the international community. We need and actively seek closer cooperation between Europe, Asia and others in order to develop strong and efficient measures to fight this appalling violation of human rights.

Respect for human dignity requires an end to the use of the death penalty. This brutal and irrevocable form of punishment has no place in a modern, civilized society. It is time for the international community to fully recognize the most fundamental human right and abolish the death penalty.

Disrespect for democracy and human rights paves the way for crisis and conflict. National sovereignty is firmly coupled with a Government's responsibility to protect and promote human rights. It is the duty of the international community and our duty as political leaders to act and react when human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated. We cannot idly stand by when people are being brutalized behind national borders.

In many armed conflicts, deliberate terror directed against civilians is used to create fear. Women suffer from violence and rape. Children are denied their dignity and childhood when forced to become soldiers. Men are imprisoned in concentration camps, forced to take sides or killed. Lives and families are ruined and the perpetrators often go unpunished. Sierra Leone is one example, Kosovo another.

Strengthening international law and humanitarian law does increase the protection of the individual. It also creates confidence amongst people, since it demonstrates that a culture of impunity will not be tolerated. A good example was the decision by the Security Council to set up a special court to try those responsible for war crimes during the conflict in Sierra Leone.

The establishment of an International Criminal Court will give us a safer and more just world. Suspected perpetrators of crimes against humanity can and will be tried in accordance with international law whenever national courts are unable or unwilling to do so. There is a strong need for joint and early action to make the International Criminal Court operational.

The past year saw a new honesty in drawing conclusions from previous mistakes and I want to congratulate the Secretary-General for having initiated the studies of our failures in Bosnia and Rwanda. The lessons learned from the chilling reports on the massacre in Srebrenica and on the genocide in Rwanda, as well as from the senseless terror in East Timor, must be put to constructive use for the future.

National sovereignty must not be used as an excuse to prevent the United Nations from taking necessary measures when fundamental humanitarian values are at stake. It is our common responsibility to make sure that commitments are made and that the resources for peace operations are available when needed. My Government warmly welcomes the recommendations in the Brahimi report, for example concerning core funding for United Nations Headquarters support for peacekeeping operations. By implementing the many recommendations in the report, the United Nations capacity to act will be significantly strengthened.

If the Security Council cannot act in an urgent situation, due to a veto or the threat of a veto, its credibility and its legitimacy suffer. Necessary action ought not to be hindered or blocked by a veto. Now is the time for the permanent members to agree on a moratorium on the use of the veto.

The credibility of the Security Council is of vital interest not only to its members, but to the United Nations membership at large. All efforts should be made to use the Security Council as a forum for negotiations and decisions in order to avoid not only the unnecessary threat of or use of the veto, but also unilateral action whereby the Council is circumvented. A modern United Nations requires a Security Council that reflects the realities of today's international relations. The Council should therefore be enlarged to make room for an increased representation of countries, not least from the developing world. We should also be prepared to periodically review the composition of the Security Council. At stake is the global relevance of the Security Council in a world vastly different from that of 1945.

The recent developments on the Korean peninsula show that long-lasting tension can also be challenged through enlightened statesmanship. But the absence of armed conflict does not equal lasting peace. It is essential to address the root causes of violent conflict by building democracy and safeguarding human rights, by promoting economic and social development and by removing trade barriers and debt burdens.

There is no alternative to the United Nations in preventing and, if needed, managing conflicts. The United Nations provides legitimacy for global action, but the United Nations alone cannot meet the needs and demands in this area. Cooperation between the United Nations and regional entities could be further developed. Sweden believes that the civilian and military capacity for crisis management and conflict prevention now being developed by the European Union (EU) could be put to use in the future by the United Nations. We will continue to work for close cooperation between the EU and the United Nations on these matters during the Swedish presidency of the EU in the spring of 2001.

During the past year, the Security Council has placed emphasis on early action and on the need to focus on the prevention of violent conflicts. Sweden strongly supports this shift towards identifying and taking early measures. We are prepared to work with other countries to support the Secretary-General in the development of a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy.

Improved interaction between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, other United Nations bodies and the Bretton Woods institutions, including the use of joint fact-finding missions, will facilitate early action. Sweden would like to see the establishment of a standing fact-finding mechanism at the disposal of the Secretary-General, as a complement to Security Council missions. Such a mechanism could be utilized at an early stage in an emerging crisis situation, without undue delays.

Another part of a United Nations strategy should be to explore and develop the link between democracy and prevention of violent conflict. Democracy offers peaceful ways of handling conflicts and different interests. Democratization is a process in which the holding of elections should only be the first step in a long-term international commitment. Establishing peace and democracy takes a lot more than free and fair elections, even if that is the beginning. The sanctions instrument needs to be refined to become truly effective. By now, we have ample evidence that sweeping economic sanctions frequently do more harm than good. The guiding principle should be to exert the strongest possible pressure on the decision-makers, while no effort should be spared to avoid negative effects on civilians. Every future sanctions regime ought to consist of sharp and enforceable measures, directed against the factors that cause and fuel crisis or conflict. Sweden stands ready to contribute actively to the debate on how this instrument of the United Nations Charter can be made more efficient.

To promote disarmament and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction remains a major challenge for the United Nations and its Member States. The result of this year's Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) gives certain hope in this regard. For the first time in many years, a consensus document on the agenda for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament was adopted. For the first time ever, the nuclear-weapon States unconditionally pledged to totally eliminate their nuclear arsenals. For the first time, a number of practical steps were identified for how to work towards this goal.

A world free from nuclear weapons will not be achieved overnight. Nor are these steps to be taken in a distant future or held hostage to States' perception of the appropriate strategic balance. The momentum achieved at the NPT Conference has to be sustained. The countries of the New Agenda Coalition will work for the implementation of the NPT results. All States

ought to immediately cease production of nuclear weapons and fissile material for weapons purposes. The Conference on Disarmament should now start its work on a ban on such material. The world community's efforts to prevent the further production of nuclear weapons must not be blocked by China, India, Pakistan or any other State. It is high time to bring the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty into force. We expect all States to live up to their commitments.

The United States' plans for a national missile defence system causes concern. In today's globalized world, we must always take account of the global effects of our decisions. It is hard to see how a possible threat, from a few States, would best be countered by a missile shield that may or may not work, and which risks setting off a renewed arms race, with immense costs in terms of wasted resources and loss of human security. The recent announcement by the United States administration to postpone the decision on the national missile defence system was therefore welcome. A more secure world ought to be built on cooperation rather than on isolation and confrontation. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty is crucial to global security and must not be jeopardized.

A major cause of concern is also the uncontrolled and destabilizing spread of small arms and light weapons. The international conference on illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons next year will be an important opportunity to address the issue in a comprehensive way. It should result in a concrete action-plan in the global, regional and national context.

The United Nations today is stronger and leaner than three years ago when the Secretary-General launched his reform programme. But there is still work to be done, for example regarding the interplay between the main bodies of the United Nations. We should give the Secretary-General the full authority to act in his leadership role. We support the Secretary-General's proposal for a shorter, more focused agenda for the General Assembly and restructuring of its work. Another main issue for the Millennium Assembly is to reach an agreement on the scales of assessment for the regular United Nations budget and for peacekeeping operations. While it is imperative that all members pay their dues on time, in full and without conditions, Sweden believes that a review of United Nations contributions should be done. The aim however must always be a fairer distribution of the financial burden among Member States, adapted to today's realities, and with capacity to pay as the guiding principle.

The United Nations must not be used as a scapegoat when the real problem is lack of political will or hesitance from us Member States to provide necessary resources. Accordingly, any call for action must be followed by a pledge to provide the personnel or financial means.

The United Nations, with its global character and legitimacy, can make a difference for mankind as well as for the individual. Behind the much used term globalization there are billions of people. They want us to provide hope. They expect us to act responsibly. They need to see concrete results. We are here, representing them, on a mission to make the United Nations a true guardian of human dignity.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jadranko Prlić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Prlić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the President on his well-deserved election. I also wish to express our sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab for his devoted work, tireless efforts and dedication while successfully presiding over the fifty-fourth United Nations General Assembly.

The Millennium Summit that concluded only a few days ago has reaffirmed the unanimous belief of the world leaders that only together, guided by the spirit and the objectives of the founding fathers of the United Nations and respecting the established system of principles, norms and standards of international relations and international law, can we successfully respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Despite its weaknesses, imperfections, inadequate efficiency and sometimes missed opportunities, the consequences of which were partly felt in my country, the United Nations succeeded in maintaining global security, in containing several local and regional conflicts, in preserving peace and in facilitating the normalization of life. It has been successful in offering relief and hope to the most unfortunate ones. Again, my country experienced this side of the United Nations as well. In this respect, we again welcome the Srebrenica Report and subsequent Brahimi Report.

If all this was achieved mostly under the conditions of the confrontations of the cold war, in a climate of mistrust and in the century during which humanity not only achieved the highest objectives but also touched the lowest depths, there should be no doubt that the United Nations can fulfil its new tasks. Addressing this Assembly on behalf of the country that in the memory of humankind is associated with the eruption of the First World War — an event that was an early omen of the entire tragedy of the twentieth century — I would like to express hope that at the very end of this century, after all the horrors of the Second World War and after the inconceivably tragic conflicts following the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina has exhausted all the misfortune of being at the epicentre of historic earthquakes. And I hope that, under the auspices of the United Nations, Bosnia and Herzegovina is ready to gain anonymity through a speedy recovery and blessed, long-lasting and happy progress.

The United Nations through its activities has and will continue to influence the developments in the world. It has to follow the rapid and very often radical changes in international relations and to adjust accordingly and find the best ways to exercise its duties and its role. The reform of the United Nations no doubt is a very delicate issue. But its postponement and endless debates that only maintain the status quo are an even greater issue. Furthermore, these things bring into question the ability of the United Nations to modernize and democratize in order to improve its capacity and efficiency. An agreement has been reached on some of the most crucial issues regarding the reform of the Security Council, including the increase in its membership — both its permanent and non-permanent seats — to include the representatives of the developed and the developing countries and to provide more equitable geographical representation of the countries. I believe that by adopting this minimum of initial reforms of the Security Council and through continuous work on the other related issues — such as the issue of the veto — a favourable atmosphere would be created and this would positively influence relations within and all the activities of the United Nations.

In our address to the General Assembly a year ago, our delegation announced that we would like to become a more active member of the international community, primarily of the United Nations. We said that we were determined to move from the position of the recipient of the concern and attention of the international organizations and forums — a position in which we were placed for more or less well-known reasons — to the position of a contributor to international efforts. The fact that we are in a position to consider the need or even the imperative of taking a more active and creative role, and thus a bigger share of responsibility, testifies to the trend of normalization of the situation in our country, which was ravaged by a war only five years ago. Although small in number, an integrated group of 13 policemen from both entities, comprising representatives of all three constituent peoples — who only recently were fighting each other — have been deployed with the international peacekeeping force in East Timor. Furthermore, with significant assistance from and the endorsement of the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH), efforts to form a joint unit composed of the military from both entities are under way. Once established, the unit would be sent to a peacekeeping mission under the United Nations flag. We are considering very seriously the possibility of presenting the candidature of Bosnia and Herzegovina for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council after the year 2010. In this way, we are confirming our commitment to the stabilization and normalization of life in our country, and particularly our commitment to economic and democratic development. We are confident that, as early as 10 years from now, Bosnia and Herzegovina will succeed in becoming a member of the most important body of the United Nations.

Although we display courage in expressing readiness to take a larger share of responsibility as a Member of the United Nations and of other regional organizations, we are fully aware that we still need the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that we still need its assistance and support in the normalization of life, in eliminating the consequences of war and in preparing ourselves for self-sustainable development and progress. Implementation of the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement still remains the main focus of the activities of the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels. Its implementation is also the primary focus of the international community and its representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Imperfect as the Peace Agreement undoubtedly is, this cannot be an excuse for a lack of commitment to its implementation. For it is exactly its consistent implementation that can bring us closer to the point at

which it would be normal, and even unavoidable, to establish a new framework and new directions for Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress towards higher levels of development and higher living standards. However, this will only be possible when the common institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina become a place and an instrument for the realization of common interests and objectives of both of its entities and of all of its constituent nations and peoples — instead of being a locus for very costly obstructions and confrontations to the detriment of all, in particular those who want to return to their homes.

In many areas throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past 12 months progress has been made. This is encouraging and indicative of the fact that in many fields of life things could advance faster and more successfully along the road towards desired and needed progress.

The return of refugees and internally displaced persons still remains the priority. There continue to be cases in which returnees have to flee their only recently rebuilt homes when faced with brutal attacks by neighbours of different ethnicities or religions. But at the same time it is encouraging that more often the returnees are welcomed by their neighbours and offered assistance and support. During the first six months of this year three times more so-called minority returns were registered compared to the same period last year. However, the number of returns is considered to be even larger, since not all returns have been registered or have not been fully completed as yet. The other positive development noticed in the returns is the fact that among the returnees there are more and more young people and families with school-age children, which was not the case in the past, when only so-called elderly households returned to their homes. This progress, of course, may be the result of improved security conditions, freedom of movement, somewhat better infrastructure or offering assistance with the repairing of houses or apartments; but, above all, this progress is the result of a growing awareness on the part of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina that it is savage, illegal and inhuman to deprive people of their sacred rights to home, life and security.

Returns were also significantly increased because indicted war criminals were more successfully brought to justice and because of a more independent, more reasonable and more constructive engagement on the part of the media. Still, the role of the international community in achieving all that has been mentioned — in particular the role of the High Representative, the Peace Implementation Council, the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Stabilization Force, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — is irreplaceable.

In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the members of the Security Council for inviting the three members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina to New York last November on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement. That visit resulted in the adoption of the New York Declaration. Implementation of the provisions of the Declaration brought about major achievements: the establishment of the State Border Service, the formation of the Secretariat of the Presidency and improvements that facilitated the functioning of this joint institution, the reconstruction and enlargement of the Council of Ministers, and the creation of conditions conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Also, as a related activity, the first steps in organizing the battle against corruption have been taken.

The decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the constituency of all the three nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina will have far-reaching consequences for overall developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This decision should reduce the unique ethnic and religious apartheid and disenfranchisement of citizens belonging to the so-called minority nations. Among the achievements that encourage and have a positive impact on the change of the overall climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be mentioned those made in the area of the judicial system. Those achievements are reflected in the professionalization of judges and prosecutors and in their modernization. Through the establishment of multi-ethnic police comprising uncompromised professionals, training and education of young policemen in police academies, composition of police forces that reflect the demographic picture of the local population, the space for abuses is thereby narrowed, and an environment favourable to arbitrary behaviour and unpunished harassment and oppression of citizens belonging to so called minority nations is eliminated.

It is my pleasure to inform the Assembly that significant efforts are being made in the promotion and

protection of human rights and civil freedoms in Bosnia and Herzegovina in all fields.

In the course of preparing for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, we will request that government bodies, courts, the police force, schools and universities, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and their leaders and distinguished individuals from different spheres of life, challenge those who still advocate and practise different forms of discrimination and intolerance and step on human rights, freedoms and human dignity.

We, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are aware that healing the consequences of war and post-war stagnation and removal of impediments to faster stabilization and progress rests primarily with the domestic political leadership.

We are also aware that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in its integration into European and other institutions. The Stability Pact for south-eastern Europe has therefore been accepted as a framework conducive to regional cooperation, elimination of mistrust, strengthening of security conditions and for catching up with missed opportunities in the spheres of human rights and democratic emancipation and economic progress. Bosnia and Herzegovina wholeheartedly embraces the Stability Pact as the most important regional endeavour so far, convinced that, despite the slow realization of a number of projects and despite the slower inflow of contributions, its objectives are fully consistent with the objectives of Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy. The achievement of these objectives would embark us on the road to faster integration into the Council of Europe, the European Union, the World Trade Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) should participate in the Stability Pact, but we share the views of those who condition its participation on the necessary democratic changes in that country. At the same time, we consider that the other countries of the region should not be kept hostage by the FRY on their way to Euro-Atlantic integration. In this context, we would like to recall that, at the early stages of the establishment of the European Union, there was no waiting list for the present members of the Union and that they did not have to pass the entering examination successfully and simultaneously. At this point in time, the waiting lists and admission procedures could be counterproductive and could encourage those forces in the region, including in my own country, to persist in continuing the state of chaos and exclusion.

At the beginning of this year, the situation in the neighbouring Republic of Croatia has been significantly improved by the opposition victory in the elections. A number of issues that burdened the relations between the two countries have practically been resolved, since some of the issues were tackled in the bilateral meetings at the highest levels immediately after the elections. The change brought about by the elections also positively influenced the return of refugees, although more visible results in this area are still to come.

However, regrettably, there is still no improvement in relations with the FRY and, at this point, it is still uncertain when the improvement might occur. For sure, without democratic changes in Serbia, the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the FRY could hardly occur. The democratic changes in the FRY certainly would positively reflect on the internal relations between the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as on overall relations in the region. The democratic changes in the Bosnia and Herzegovina neighbourhood have certainly cut off the influx of exported elements of destabilization and crisis. I have already referred to the positive example of changes in Croatia.

We, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, must gather the courage and strength to face our reality and to choose the path and the direction that would lead us speedily towards the achievements that would compensate for the decade of suffering, deprivation and missed opportunities. In the process of making this clear and rational choice, we would like to count on the unreserved support of the international community, and on a rather sooner than later integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. We have to say that this integration is already very much behind schedule and we do not have a lot of time to waste.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.